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FARM TENANCY IN IOWA.*

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Information on the subject of tenancy in any general way begins with the Census of 1880, at which time the figure for Iowa stood at twenty-four per cent. By 1890 it had grown to twenty-eight per cent; by 1900, to thirty-five per cent; and in the last census year, 1910, had reached thirty-eight per cent. Thus, from just below a quarter of all farms in the hands of tenants thirty years ago, there are at present almost two out of every five.

Contrary to the preconceived notions of many, Iowa is by no means uniform from one end to the other. There are a few well-defined areas in which differing soils, crops, and types of farming prevail, and tenancy varies with these varying types.

In the northeastern part of the state dairying predominates. The farms are a few acres smaller in size than the average for the state. The value of land per acre is here fourteen dollars (about one seventh) below the average for the state, though in one or two of these counties it is above the average, showing that dairying is not necessarily confined to the lower grade land. As a matter of fact it can be carried on successfully on the highest priced land of the state and has in a few record cases yielded over eighty dollars per acre gross income. In these dairy counties there are two peculiarities noticeable: first, the tenancy is low, being for twelve counties nine per cent. lower than the average; second, cash rent is much more prevalent than share, there being about nineteen per cent. of the farms rented for cash and but nine per cent. for a share of the product. The explanation of this would lie undoubtedly in the fact that on a dairy farm it is difficult to keep the shares separate—pasture, hay, and fodder in general not lending themselves to the process of easy division and separate sale. Tenancy is low in this

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section for at least two reasons: the land has not risen to a very high figure, and dairying pays.

The southwestern part of the state is a cattle-feeding section. The cattle feeder scorns the exacting details of dairying. He knows dairying pays, but he doesn't like the business. Taking ten counties in this section, we find as before cash rent far in the lead of share; but unlike the dairy district, the total percentage of rented land is high, being six per cent. above the general average. The price of land in these counties is fourteen dollars an acre higher than the average for the whole state, while the farms are eight acres larger than the general average. Cattle feeding is an attractive business; but it frequently results in putting a successful man on a large farm and surrounding him with a number of tenant farmers from whom he buys corn.

With an altogether different basis of classification, ten of the oldest counties in Iowa may be taken along the eastern and southern border, in which the quality of land is not the best. Farming has not paid as well as in some other parts of Iowa. Here tenancy is low, corresponding almost exactly to the percentage of the dairy district, except that the cash tenancy is but three points ahead of the share, instead of more than twice as great. The price of land is thirty dollars below the average.

In the northwest corner, where land is comparatively new, low in price, and is held still to a considerable extent by non-resident speculators, tenancy is high. In fact, it is higher here than in any other logical grouping of counties that suggests itself, reaching for ten counties forty-seven per cent. Share tenancy, for the first time in the combinations found, is greater than cash, twenty-two and one half per cent. of the farms being rented on shares, and nineteen and one half per cent. for cash. This is the most poorly drained of any part of the state, and crops are, on this account, subject to much damage by excessive rains, such as have prevailed during most of the ten years just past. The tenants are unwilling to take all the risks and frequently refuse to pay cash. Moreover, this is a grain-growing region, and the mechanical difficulties of the share plan are as small as possible.

One further attempt may be made at classification, taking as the basis the price of land without regard to the type of farming. It appears that tenancy is decidedly high on high-priced land. In the ten counties of highest values the average price per acre is one hundred and twenty-seven dollars, and tenancy stands at four per cent. above the state average. In the ten counties with the lowest-priced land, the price averaging sixty-three dollars, the percentage of tenancy is twenty-five,—only two thirds as high as for the state.

The facts at hand suggest strongly that so far as Iowa is concerned at present, the leading factor in the increase of tenancy is speculation. A great number of men are investing in land, not for the sake of the rent which it will bring, but in the hope of an increase in the selling value. The land is in demand and is let out to tenants for what it will bring, usually well under the figure demanded by investors who depend on the annual income. Thus far these speculations have paid well, and as long as the price of land continues on the up grade, the attendant tenancy conditions may be expected to remain as they are. Speculation is still prevalent throughout the state, though particularly so in the groups of newer counties.

The second factor back of the tenancy movement appears to be the type of farming pursued; since in the cases where other influences are constant, the tenancy varies widely from one type of operations to another.

The third and most constant factor, though not the most effective in all cases, is the value of the land. This fact is unmistakable: other things being equal, tenancy increases directly with the price. But other things are not always equal; hence, the prevailing notion that price is necessarily the controlling force would seem by this study to require important modification. Taking Iowa, county by county, and comparing price of land to tenancy, the figures become very much confused, which would seem sufficient proof that other forces are present.

It is not the writer's belief that the three factors just reviewed are the only ones needed in explaining tenancy in Iowa. No doubt there are many factors of a local, even per-

sonal nature that must be studied before the whole current of the movement can be understood.

Iowa is counted a good farming state, and Iowa farmers are held up as a type of prosperity; yet all told, the land is slipping out of their hands. This unfortunate fact is explained partly in terms of the farmers; many of them were equal to the occasion when farming was a simple business, but for some reason cannot adapt themselves to the more complex business of the present. They stick to their old methods and their accustomed crops. For them the price of land is too high; they can do better on cheaper land; but if they remain in Iowa they must rent, though they will not prosper. For another type of farmer (and they are numerous), the difficulty is not so much inability to handle the land skillfully, as lack of capital for the initial investment. To buy an average sized farm in Iowa at the average price requires sixteen thousand dollars, and a beginner can hardly hope to borrow half of that amount; hence he must have eight thousand besides another thousand or two for equipment and he does not have it; therefore he must remain a tenant, for a considerable number of years. Supplementing these changes, the past ten years have brought prosperity to the merchants and bankers of Iowa, and they have bought farms in the vicinity of every hamlet. They do not want to sell but prefer to accommodate the tenant with the farm on which to operate.

Tenancy may not be bad, but it is less desirable than land ownership by the tiller of the soil. A clear understanding of the case by the farmer himself, and a better system of farm credit would at least postpone the day when the tenants outnumber the land-owning farmer.